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AUTHOR Oestereicher, Mary
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ABSTRACT

Student assessments and program evaluations conducted for the initial year of Brooklyn College's developmental education program are described. Four evaluative studies in 1979 focused on the reading component, the speech course, student and faculty perceptions of the program, and instructional effectiveness of the entire program. Descriptive data were obtained on about 200 students, nearly all of whom were minorities with an average age of 20. Students were administered a number of tests at the beginning and end of the academic year. The tests included the City University of New York Writing Assessment Test, which requires students to produce a coherent and adequately developed writing sample within 50 minutes. Although the magnitude of the gains tended to be small, statistically significant increases were found in nearly every test and subject, and there were indications of meaningful educational gains. One important feature of student assessment in the program was the administration of progress evaluations to all students at regular intervals in reading and writing and speech. The means of the progress evaluations were generally not high. Data are provided on the test results, reading progress evaluations, and student satisfaction ratings. (SW)

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EVALUATION IN BROOKLYN COLLEGE'S
DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

by Mary Oestereich

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Newsletter of the STRUCTURED YEAR PROGRAM

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STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION IN BROOKLYN COLLEGE'S DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

by Mary Oestereicher

To establish an effective remedial program that could become even more useful, student assessment and program evaluation were regarded as extremely important from the beginning of the Developmental Education Program (DEP) at Brooklyn College, a unit of the City University of New York. In the spring of the program's initial year, a broad range of evaluative studies was conducted. The information obtained during the course of these evaluations was to be used to improve the planning and management of the program. The data gathered formed one piece of a long-range plan that included follow-up on the program and especially on its students over the ensuing years.

Reported here are descriptions of the evaluations conducted for the program's initial year and the major findings. Four separate evaluative studies were undertaken and completed in 1979. The reading component of the program was evaluated by a professor of reading from outside the college¹ and the speech component by an external professor of speech.² A synthesis of student and faculty perceptions of the program was made by a professor of English at Brooklyn College, one who was not a member of the developmental program.³ A comprehensive evaluation of the instructional effectiveness of the entire program was made by an external professor of educational psychology.⁴

The evaluation of the Developmental Education Program's reading component was based on classroom observations, interviews with faculty and students, and analyses of test results and curriculum materials. A survey of the reading faculty included questions on the reading curriculum, diagnostic procedures, and the amount of relevant formal teacher education. The students were also queried about their perceptions of reading courses they had taken and of themselves as readers.

For the evaluative report on the Speech Course, the author's information was drawn from written documents, classroom observations, and interviews with faculty and students. The areas she addressed included administration, students, curriculum and instruction, and facilities. For each of these areas, she provided a detailed discussion and a list of "commendations" and "concerns."

Kenneth Bruffee, author of *The Developmental Education Program, Brooklyn College: A Conceptual Synthesis*, described

his purpose as "...to hold a mirror up before the DEP faculty to reflect the faculty's views of the first year of work." To gather the necessary information, he interviewed each faculty member individually and three small groups of students. He asked questions of all regarding the purposes of a college education in general and of the Developmental Education Program in particular; he also asked questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the students and of the program. He then synthesized this information to present a description of the students in pursuit of an education and also an explication of the faculty's goals for the students. He made certain recommendations for improvements, e.g., stronger integration among the individual courses.

The comprehensive report was designed to help determine the instructional effectiveness of the program by analyzing data about the students and their performance. The author reviewed information describing the students when they entered the program, and data on student performance before and after a period of instruction in the program. A partial summary is presented below.

Students

Descriptive data were obtained on approximately 200 students, nearly all of them members of minorities, with an average age of 20. The mean high school grade point average was 65.3, and more than half the students had averages below 70. They were drawn from 98 different high schools, 88% of them from nonvocational high schools. Two-thirds of the students had earned fewer than 10 academic credits in high school. Females made up 63% of the group and males, 37%. For 96% of the students, English was the main language spoken at home.

Pretests and Posttests

Students were administered a number of tests at the beginning and end of the academic year.⁵ One purpose of the testing was to help measure academic growth in various areas.

Upon college entry, testing in reading, writing, and mathematics is required centrally by the City University of New York (CUNY), to determine at the outset whether or not students are prepared to undertake junior and senior year college work (defined as work beyond 60 credits). Between the time of college entry and the beginning of the junior year, students are

(cont'd on page 2, col 1)

⁵ This analysis includes only students for whom both beginning and end of year results were available.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT . . . cont'd

repeatedly given the opportunity to attain the required scores on the three tests. At Brooklyn College this same set of tests has been used to determine which students will enter the Developmental Educational Program: students were placed into the program because they did not attain the required score on any of the three tests. One major goal of the program was to enable students to attain higher scores on these tests. Thus the tests played an important, though not exclusive, role in shaping the curriculum for the program and also in measuring the success of the program.

The set of tests included the CUNY Writing Assessment Test, which requires students to produce a coherent and adequately developed piece of writing in standard English on an assigned topic within 50 minutes. The compositions were rated on a scale from one to five by each of two raters. For the essay to be passed, a score of at least four by each rater was required. The CUNY Reading Assessment Test was the California Achievement Test, which measures vocabulary and comprehension. Forms 19c and 19d served as the pretests and posttests, respectively, the required score at the end being 52. The CUNY Mathematics Assessment Test measured chiefly computational skills.

As the CUNY tests did not assess the full range of skills taught in the program, other tests were administered as well. In reading there were two other premeasures and postmeasures used: the Cooperative English Test of vocabulary and comprehension and the Brooklyn College Comprehensive Reading Test. The latter was designed by reading teachers to measure several of the major skills taught in the reading course. In mathematics also, a second set of premeasures and postmeasures was administered: the Brooklyn College Mathematics Test, assessing the arithmetic and algebra skills taught in the fundamental mathematics courses.

Pretest and Posttest Results

Table 1 presents the results of this testing. Although the magnitude of the gains tends to be small, statistically significant increases were found in nearly every test and subject, and there were indications of meaningful educational gains.

Reading. Tests of reading comprehension showed more substantial increases than did tests of vocabulary. For vocabulary, two of the three tests showed no significant change, and the third showed a statistically significant but small change. Reading

comprehension did show consistently significant increases. The greatest increases occurred in the Brooklyn College (BC) Comprehensive Reading subtests, the tests that are the most skill-specific. Reading speed also showed a small increase. The percentage of students who attained the required score on the CUNY posttest was 28%.

Table 1
Performance on CUNY and BC Tests

Variable	Pretest		Posttest		N	Difference
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
CUNY— Reading, Vocabulary	16.5	5.2	17.6	4.9	124	1.1**
CUNY— Reading, Comprehension	23.0	6.7	27.2	5.8	120	4.2**
CUNY— Writing	3.3	1.0	3.5	.7	77	.2*
CUNY— Math, Arithmetic	9.7	3.7	14.0	3.3	100	4.3**
CUNY— Math, Algebra	7.3	3.6	9.3	4.2	98	1.9**
BC—Reading, score 1 (Library)	5.6	2.4	10.3	2.5	139	4.7**
BC—Reading, score 2 (Prereading)	5.6	2.6	9.1	2.0	139	3.5**
BC—Reading, score 3 (Note-taking)	6.2	3.7	8.9	3.7	139	2.7**
BC—Reading, score 4 (Vocabulary)	13.7	5.1	14.6	6.2	138	.9
BC—Reading, score 5 (Comprehension)	14.0	5.9	17.4	5.2	139	3.4**
BC—Reading, score 6 (Critical Evaluation)	12.5	7.7	17.8	9.0	141	5.2**
COOP— Reading, Vocabulary	147.5	9.2	146.8	9.3	139	-.7
COOP— Reading, Comprehension	143.7	9.9	148.0	7.5	139	4.3**
COOP— Reading, Speed	141.3	8.9	144.8	7.9	139	3.4**
BC—Math	5.8	2.3	10.1	3.4	79	4.3**

*p < .05

**p < .01

Writing. On the CUNY Writing Assessment Test, the increase in scores was significant though slight. Further, the standard deviation decreased from 1.0 to 0.7, suggesting that a greater proportion of students learned to write at an acceptable level.

Mathematics. On both the CUNY Mathematics Tests and the Brooklyn College Mathematics Tests, all gains were statistically significant but not large. The gains in arithmetic were greater than the gains in algebra.

Progress Evaluations

One important feature of student assessment in the Developmental Education Program was the administration of progress evaluations to all students at regular intervals during the academic year in reading and writing and speech. The tests were constructed by the teaching faculty to measure the skills taught in the several weeks prior to a particular evaluation. The criteria for scoring were determined in advance, and the tests were scored anonymously, most often by two separate faculty members. The tests were administered to all students simultaneously in a large lecture room.

Reading. There were six progress evaluations in reading, measuring a wide range of reading, writing, and study skills.

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Matthew Sanders, Associate Editor
Claire Meirowitz, Production Editor
Debra Schifano, Secretary, SYP

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Among the abilities tested were, for example, literal comprehension, use of context clues for word meaning, the identification of main ideas and supporting details, drawing conclusions and making inferences. The tests emphasized critical reading and often asked students to restate passage themes in writing.

Writing. Progress evaluations in writing were administered at five-week intervals throughout the academic year. Each had two parts: 1) an objective test of the grammar and syntax covered in the weeks preceding the test; 2) a 50-minute essay test following approximately the format and standards of the CUNY Writing Assessment Test but providing more explicit guidance regarding the nature of the essay required.

Speech. Progress evaluations in speech measured listening and speaking skills. In the eight tests, emphasis was placed on critical analysis of material heard, and on the ability to communicate ideas orally.

Progress Evaluation Results

The results of the progress evaluations in reading, writing, and speech are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4, respectively. The means of the progress evaluations are generally not high: most are in the 50s and 60s for reading and writing, and in the 80s for speech. The last set of columns shows the correlation of the progress evaluations with the final grade and the final-exam grade. The pattern of results shows that as the year progresses, the progress evaluation grade shows an increasing relationship with the final course grade. Also, Progress Evaluation V in all three subjects is closely correlated with final course grade; it could thus alert the faculty about students who are headed for failure.

Table 2
Reading Progress Evaluations

Number	Full Group			Corr. with Final Grade
	Mean	S.D.	N	
I	80.9	14.6	194	.28
II	74.4	19.4	189	.38
III	68.7	16.3	175	.36
IV	78.8	13.7	178	.36
V	65.2	20.5	162	.62
VI	54.5	22.7	158	.44

Table 3
Writing Progress Evaluations

Number	Full Group			Correlation with	
	Mean	S.D.	N	Final Exam	Final Grade
I	73.5	12.8	161	.32	.28
II	67.9	15.4	187	.45	.32
III	46.5	14.6	180	.54	.36
IV	50.9	16.3	172	.54	.46
V	49.2	14.7	153	.57	.51
VI	49.7	14.2	158	.54	.44
VII	56.8	14.1	128	.68	.53
VIII	65.8	16.0	142	.95	.56

Table 4
Speech Progress Evaluations

Number	Full Group			Correlation with	
	Mean	S.D.	N	Final Exam	Final Grade
I	81.7	11.6	201	.52	.47
II	81.9	14.3	186	.47	.44
III	80.8	12.6	181	.42	.42
IV-Oral	84.8	8.8	182	.25	.22
IV-Written	72.2	16.0	167	.57	.45
V	81.8	5.7	173	.57	.50
VI	85.4	5.4	157	.58	.58
VII	85.9	5.7	139	.81	.70
VIII	84.5	7.4	146	.83	.58

Student Satisfaction Ratings

At the end of the academic year students were asked their degree of satisfaction with what they had accomplished in each subject area. The results are presented in Table 5. Clearly a substantial proportion of the students was satisfied. The combined percentage of students who were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" ranges from 58% for mathematics to 88% for speech. Also, inspection of the results in the "very dissatisfied" column shows that for reading, writing, and speech the percentage is very low.

Table 5
Results of Satisfaction Ratings
Categories of Rating*

Subject	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N
Reading	30.7	47.4	15.3	6.6	137
Writing	24.6	42.0	29.0	4.3	138
Math	23.7	34.1	23.7	18.5	135
Speech	46.7	40.9	9.5	2.9	137

*Ratings in each category are percentages of total respondents.

Afterward

As planned, the results of these evaluations of the Developmental Education Program in its initial year were used for improving the program. The students from the program's first year were also studied on an ongoing basis as they pursued their education. Systematic evaluation programs such as the ones described in this paper may very likely improve and strengthen remedial coursework for college students, not only at Brooklyn College but on other campuses as well.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Joseph F. Brunner, "An Evaluation of the Developmental Education Program's Reading Component at Brooklyn College," September, 1979.

² Ella A. Erway, "An Evaluation Report on the Speech Course of the Developmental Education Program, Brooklyn College," Spring, 1979.

³ Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The Developmental Education Program, Brooklyn College: A Conceptual Synthesis," Spring, 1979.

⁴ Richard M. Wolf, "Report on Developmental Education Program," Fall 1979.